

Registered Nurses (RNs) provide care, treatment, counseling and health education to patients and their families. RNs are also involved in health promotion and disease prevention activities; they monitor patients' conditions, give medications and treatments prescribed by doctors; and communicate with physicians and other members of the health care team. There are three avenues of licensure as an RN: a two-year associate degree from an approved junior or community college; a three-year diploma from an approved hospital-based school of nursing; and a four-year baccalaureate program from an approved university or college.

There are more RNs in North Carolina than any other single health profession; a total of 79,835 active RNs practiced in North Carolina in 2005. The RN-to-population ratio in the state has nearly doubled from 46 RNs per 10,000 population in 1979 to nearly 92 RNs per 10,000 population in 2005. From 1979-1990 the national RN-to-population ratio exceeded that of North Carolina. Since 1991, North Carolina has had more RNs relative to its population than the national average (Figure 31). The supply of RNs in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties has shown similar growth rates since 1979 with metropolitan areas having consistently more RNs per 10,000 people than nonmetropolitan areas (Figure 32). The RN supply per 10,000 population in counties with adequate numbers of health professionals (non-PHPsAs), was more than double that of whole-county and part-county PHPsAs and the gap is widening (Figure 33).

In 2005, the distribution of RNs varied across the state but no county was without one (Figure 34). Between 2001 and 2005, 64 counties saw a decrease in their RN-to-population ratio and the other 36 counties saw increase of less than 50%. All counties had at least one RN in 2001 (Figure 35).

Table 6: Summary Statistics for Registered Nurses in North Carolina

RNs per 10,000 Population		Total Active RNs	
1979:	46.07	1979:	26,807
2001:	91.34	2001:	74,790
2005:	92.15	2005:	79,835

Number of Registered Nurses per 10,000 Population in 2005

Metropolitan Areas:	101.71
Nonmetropolitan Areas:	70.72
For the 11 counties designated as whole county PHPsAs*:	39.93
For the 27 counties designated as part county PHPsAs*:	83.14
For the 62 counties not designated as PHPsAs*:	99.55

County Level Data

# of counties increasing RN supply, 2001-2005:	36
# of counties decreasing RN supply, 2001-2005:	64
# of counties with no RNs in 2005:	0

*Persistent Health Professional Shortage Area